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VENEZUELAN MILITARY TO HELP FIGHT BORDER CRIME

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[By Henry Rojas]

[Excerpts] Guasdalito, Venezuela -- The armed forces of Colombia and Venezuela have agreed to jointly confront crimes such as kidnappings and cattle rustling that have spread throughout the border area, especially in the Arauca region and Apure State. The agreement was reached after a meeting of the two countries' military high commands in the Venezuelan town of Guasdalito.

The military summit meeting was presided over by the Venezuelan justice minister and by the commanders of the Armed Forces of Cooperation [Fuerzas Armadas de Cooperacion], the Judicial Technical Police, the Office of Military Intelligence and the 5th and 6th Brigades. Colombia was represented by Alvaro Arenas Suarez, national director of the Administrative Department of Security of Colombia; the chief of the services branch of the National Police [Servicios de la Policia Nacional]; the chief of DIPEC [not further identified]; the commander of the 5th Brigade; and the commander of the Army's Centaur Task Force.

The participants analyzed the growing problem of kidnapping in the border area, taking into consideration the fact that if there is no combined action among the security organizations of the two countries it will be impossible to fight the problem because of the ease with which the kidnappers continuously move their victims from one side of the border to the other.

Colombian Proposal

The Colombian delegation proposed the establishment of a continuous exchange of information as well as mechanisms and measures to make impossible any kidnappings, cattle rustling or cattle smuggling.

General Beltel, chief of the operations command of the 1st Brigade of Venezuela, proposed that his country and Colombia frequently hold this type of meeting so that agreements reached on this subject are duly fulfilled. He noted: "These crimes affect Colombians and Venezuelans alike, and if we don't join efforts to confront them, we will lose a most important battle."

The participants also analyzed the situation of Arauca region cattlemen, who are abandoning their herds and seeking refuge in Venezuelan cities such as San Cristobal as a result of the subversion and frequent kidnap threats.

The Venezuelan military spokesman stated their concern over the many kidnappings that take place in their country's border region. Most of the victims are taken to Colombian territory, presumably in some cases by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, which is believed to be involved in some kidnap cases, such as that of cattleman Ruiz Zapata.

The Venezuelan military stated their concern over a massive infiltration of Colombian guerrillas into Venezuelan territory, and asked their Colombian colleagues to conduct special operations to avoid this situation which, they said, "dangerously affects our national sovereignty and border relations."

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